

WRITTEN TESTIMONY
OF THE
CONNECTICUT COALITION
FOR **JUSTICE**
IN EDUCATION FUNDING
TO THE
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

February 23, 2009

The Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding appreciates this opportunity to submit written comments pertinent to a few of the raised bills before you today.

CCJEF is a broad-based coalition of parents, education associations, child-focused advocacy organizations, and urban, suburban, and rural communities across the state who are committed to improving the fiscal infrastructure of public education so as to ensure high-quality schooling and equal educational opportunity for all children, regardless of family or community wealth. CCJEF communities provide public education for nearly 250,000 children, including approximately three-fourths of Connecticut's minority students, those from low-income households, and students from homes where English is not the primary language.

- **Raised Bill No. 945 — An Act Concerning World Language Requirements:** CCJEF salutes the addition of the two-credit world language requirement for graduation, given the increasingly multicultural nation and global society within which we live. Already our students lag far behind their counterparts from other developed nations in the acquisition of multiple languages and essential cultural literacy. This threatens our role in international commerce and diplomacy, as well as peaceful coexistence with other peoples. We trust that the State Board of Education will now work towards recognizing world languages as a core component of the K-8 curriculum.

Connecticut educators who participated in the 2005 education adequacy cost study commissioned by CCJEF identified world languages as an essential element in defining an adequate education. (Therefore, those costs were included in the adequacy calculations.) Unfortunately, under the state's ECS and other education funding streams, the world language requirement is essentially another unfunded state mandate, one that carries costly staffing, materials, and space implications for every school district.

- **Raised Bill No. 6488 — An Act Concerning Installation of Photovoltaic Panels on School Buildings:** CCJEF lauds this bill as an important step toward lowering energy costs for school districts and encouraging the early adoption of green energy technologies across our state. This bill supports energy efficiencies that model for students and their

communities the importance of taking actions that contribute to a cleaner environment and global sustainability. We encourage the further strengthening of this bill by allowing as an eligible reimbursable cost the installation of photovoltaic panels even when roof replacement is not yet necessary.

- **Raised Bill No. 6491 — An Act Concerning Longitudinal Studies of Student Achievement:** With reference to Section 1, paragraph (e), CCJEF strongly supports the provision of education data to public school officials, nonprofit organizations, researchers, and educational policymakers. Ready access to data and its analysis by competent researchers with varying interests are fundamental to improving educational practices, closing the achievement gap, and ensuring transparency of government.
- **Raised Bill No. 6492 — An Act Authorizing Board of Education Contingency Funds:** CCJEF supports this long-overdue provision, which should encourage cost-efficiencies throughout the budget cycle and the strategic educational use of any end-of-year surplus funds that districts may have.
- **Raised Bill No. 6495 — An Act Concerning Participation of Towns in Charter Schools and Interdistrict Magnet Schools:** CCJEF objects to the extension of the enrollment zone for charter schools to a 20-mile radius and is also skeptical of extending that radius to interdistrict magnet schools.

As for charter schools, to further weaken regular public schools by requiring that even more communities lose students and therefore ECS funding and yet also incur greater transportation and other costs merely to sustain the growth aspirations of charter management companies seems altogether unjust and unnecessary. The cost implications of extending the charter school reach would significantly exacerbate the financial instability of urban school districts and further erode their ability to plan/budget for subsequent school years. Connecticut's long and proud history of local municipality-operated education should not be sacrificed either to political whim or noisy clamors for school choice schemes that amount to the privatization of education financed by public taxpayers. Moreover, unlike the interdistrict magnet schools, which have been endorsed by the courts as desired models of racial and economic integration, the charter schools have an exceedingly poor record of attending to desegregation goals.

As for magnet schools, if extending the catchment area to 20 miles is aimed at helping these schools satisfy the fundamental racial and economic integration mandates upon which their state funding rightfully ought to depend, then during the initial approval processes, closer attention should be paid to where such schools are to be located and far better due diligence employed by the State Board of Education in reviewing the needs assessments and marketing studies of magnet operators. (For these same reasons, improved review processes ought to be employed with all charter applications.) Even more importantly, if interdistrict magnet schools are to attract or retain sufficient numbers of students from all races and economic backgrounds within their immediate vicinities, the state needs to provide ample financial incentives to surrounding districts to effect willing participation. For example, full funding of magnet costs, including tuition, transportation, and special education, would surely entice any district to participate.

One final argument against extending the radius for charters and magnets to 20 miles: Not only does the transporting of schoolchildren over such long distances unreasonably extend the school-day and increase the safety risks posed by Connecticut's overly congested highways and streets, but also such action would further increase the transportation costs and scheduling complexities borne by the sending districts (a direct cost in the case of charters, and for the magnets, indirectly through rising tuition charges). These added costs are not trivial, inasmuch as state transportation grants have long been capped at unrealistically low reimbursement levels.

- **Raised Bill No. 6495 — An Act Concerning Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care:** CCJEF urges that any additional transportation, counseling, or other costs associated with a change of placement be paid for in their entirety by the Department of Children and Families and not be an additional expense to be borne by the school that must continue to serve that student. In other words, a change of foster home and town for the child should not become another unfunded (and unbudgeted) mandate for the school district continuing to provide regular and special education services to that child.

###

Dianne Kaplan deVries, Ed.D.
Project Director
Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding
P.O. Box 260398
Hartford, CT 06126
(860) 461-0320 w / (603) 325-5250 m
dkdevries_uk@yahoo.com
www.ccjef.org